

(b) The question does not arise.

(c) India is committed to developing friendly and good-neighbourly relations with China on the basis of Panchsheel and mutual sensitivity to each other's concerns.

India seeks to establish a relationship of peace, friendship and co-operation with Pakistan. India has reiterated its commitment to resuming the Composite Dialogue in an appropriate environment. The Prime Minister has also reiterated India's commitment to resuming dialogue with Pakistan at the highest level.

Sino-Indian ties

173. SHRI B.J. PANDA: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have a proposal to improve Sino-Indian ties;

(b) if so, the steps taken in this regard; and

(c) the response of the Chinese Government thereto?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI AJIT KUMAR PANJA): (a) and (b) Government of India is committed to the improvement and development of friendly relations with China on the basis of Panchsheel and the principle of mutual sensitivity to each other's concerns. Relations have progressed. Both sides have exchanged high level visits and are moving ahead in different areas such as trade, cultural exchanges, military exchanges, security and foreign office dialogues, and science and technology co-operation. Bilateral trade in the year 2000 amounted to US\$ 2.92 billion, an increase of 47% over 1999. India and China are seeking a fair, reasonable and mutually acceptable settlement of the boundary question through dialogue.

(c) Senior Chinese leader and NPC Chairman Li Peng visited India from January 9—17, 2001. He described the primary objective of his visit as the promotion of friendship and co-operation with

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India. He spoke of the similarity of the views of both countries on several major international issues such as multipolarity and globalisation. He added that differences between the two countries were far outweighed by common ground.

Mekong-Ganga Swarna Bhumi Project

174. SHRI C. RAMACHANDRAIAH: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether he has launched a six nation Mekong Ganga Swarna Bhumi Project during his visit to Laos; and

(b) the aims of this project and the names of countries joining this project?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI AJIT KUMAR PANJA): (a) and (b) The Vientiane Declaration on Mekong-Ganga Cooperation was signed in Vientiane, Lao PDR on 10 November, 2000 between the Governments of India, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam. This initiative aims to promote cooperation among these six countries in the areas of Tourism, Culture, Education, Transport and Communication. Cooperation in the sectors identified under the Vientiane Declaration between the six countries stresses their civilisational affinity and expresses the revival, in the present day context, of an interactive vitality that has proven itself in the past, and can culturally and commercially energise the region.

Refugees from Afghanistan

175. SHRIMATI JAYAPRADA NAHATA: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether about 30,000 Indians left Afghanistan due to the political upheaval;

(b) if so, the action taken to help such refugees on their arrival in India; and